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ASHGABAT PLEASE PASS TO SCA PDAS MANN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SCENE-SETTER FOR SCA PDAS MANN'S AUGUST 16 VISIT
TO SRI LANKA

Classified By: CDA JAMES R. MOORE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Your visit comes at a particularly contentious and violent point in the Government of Sri Lanka's (GSL's) conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Low-level tit-for-tat violence plagued the north and the east over the last several months, and at the end of July ground fighting broke out in the eastern district of Trincomalee. Violence on the ground continues, with an LTTE assassination of a Tamil government official and an LTTE claymore mine attack in Colombo over the last 3 days, and allegations that a GSL air strike in the north killed upward of 60 Tamil youth.

¶2. (C) Summary cont'd: On previous visits, PDAS Camp and A/S Boucher urged a strengthening of the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) and a return to the negotiating table. They also condemned LTTE terrorist tactics while calling on the government to investigate and prosecute human rights violations. In meetings with GSL officials, we recommend that you underscore those messages and emphasize that an immediate cessation of hostilities is a precursor to negotiating a peaceful, viable settlement. When you speak to members of the LTTE's proxy political party, the Tamil National Alliance, you should condemn terrorist tactics, including violence and the control of an irrigation canal in an attempt to influence the GSL. End summary.

THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION

¶3. (SBU) Your visit comes in the wake of several weeks marked by battles between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) security services and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres in both the east and the north. On July 20 the LTTE took control of an irrigation canal in the north, cutting off access to drinking water for an estimated 60,000 civilians and irrigation for 30,000 acres of rice fields. The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) responded with air strikes, and on July 26 began a ground offensive, the first since the Cease-Fire Agreement was signed in 2002. The battle quickly spread away from the site of the canal, moving to the eastern town of Muttur and surrounding areas in the Trincomalee district, where the LTTE struck government targets.

¶4. (SBU) Ground fighting has continued, with the northern peninsula of Jaffna also the sight of skirmishes in recent days. Throughout the north and the east, tens of thousands of civilians were displaced because of the violence. Civilian access to water and sanitation is a major concern for NGO representatives, many of whom have not been granted access to examine needs or provide aid. The August 5 murder of 17 local Tamil employees of a French NGO in

Muttur by unknown perpetrators has also given rise to concern; the GSL is receiving assistance from Australian investigators to solve the crime.

15. (SBU) Violence has not diminished over the past few weeks, with the LTTE presumably responsible for 2 high profile incidents in Colombo in the last 3 days: the August 12 assassination of Kethesh Loganathan, a moderate Tamil who was Deputy Head of the GSL Peace Secretariat, and an August 14 claymore mine attack that hit a Special Task Force (STF) vehicle, killing four STF staff and three civilians and injuring several. The STF vehicle was serving as an escort for the Pakistani High Commissioner, who may have been the intended target of the attack. If that is in fact the case, it marks a change in LTTE tactics; traditionally, the Tigers have refrained from targeting foreigners, asserting that their conflict is a domestic issue. The afternoon of August 14, a GSL air strike in Mullaithivu in the north reportedly killed upward of 60 Tamil youth; the media featured conflicting accounts of whether the victims were orphaned children or LTTE child soldiers at a training camp.

THE UNRAVELING CEASE-FIRE:
HOW DID THINGS BECOME SO VIOLENT?

16. (SBU) Despite the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) implemented in 2002, talks between the parties broke down almost immediately after its ratification, and formal communications between the GSL and the LTTE were suspended until February 2006, when the two sides met for discussions in Geneva. At the Geneva talks, touted as a forum to strengthen the CFA, the GSL promised to control armed

factions in its territories while the LTTE pledged to stop attacks on GSL targets. However, following the talks, rather than working to fulfill those commitments, both sides began cataloging the other's violations and responded to violence in kind.

17. (SBU) On April 25 the LTTE carried out a suicide bombing in Colombo, killing eight and badly wounding the intended target, Sri Lankan Army (SLA) Commander Sarath Fonseka. The GSL responded with air strikes against LTTE targets, positing that the response was defensive and proportional. A second set of talks, scheduled for May in Oslo, were derailed when the LTTE refused to come to the table with the GSL delegation. Throughout June, the LTTE carried out claymore mine and grenade attacks, killing and injuring small numbers with each incident.

18. (SBU) Exacerbating communal tension and deepening mistrust between the sides, some security forces were implicated in accounts of human rights abuses. These included the April extrajudicial killing of five Tamil men near a Sri Lankan Army (SLA) check-point in the northern Jaffna peninsula and a similar death of four Tamil men in May, the May murder of a Tamil family in Kayts in Jaffna district, and an incident in June when security forces lobbed hand grenades into a church housing civilian refugees in Mannar in the northwest, killing at least one and injuring upwards of 30.

MESSAGES FROM THE US AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

19. (SBU) To date, public statements from the Embassy and the Tokyo Donor Conference Co-Chairs (US, Japan, Norway, and EU) have asked both sides to refrain from violence and return to the negotiating table. Public messages in recent months have tempered condemnation of LTTE terrorist tactics and violence with a push for the GSL to address human rights concerns. Our messages have addressed the need to strengthen the CFA, which is rapidly disintegrating.

¶10. (C) The CFA was already under strain during then-PDAS Camp's May 15-16 visit, when he urged a return to the negotiating table and encouraged GSL officials to investigate and prosecute human rights abuse allegations and to address legitimate Tamil grievances. A/S Boucher delivered a similar message during his June 5 visit.

¶11. (SBU) In early June, the European Union (EU) listed the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Shortly thereafter, the LTTE demanded that monitors from EU countries leave the Nordic-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) since they could not be impartial. The LTTE said it could "no longer guarantee the safety" of the EU member-state monitors past September 1. The Swedes, Danes, and Finns plan to withdraw their monitors in the north and east as a result. The Norwegians and Icelanders will remain for the time being, but it is unclear how long the SLMM can continue to function with reduced numbers and in such a climate.

¶12. (C) GSL interlocutors consistently told US officials that the government was taking measures to investigate abuses and reach out to the Tamil community, though they provided no specific examples of the latter. GSL representatives asked that the international community continue to pressure the Tigers to negotiate, expressing thanks for US influence in bringing about the EU ban on the LTTE.

SUGGESTED MESSAGES FOR YOUR MEETINGS

¶13. (C) When you meet with GSL officials, in addition to reiterating the points former PDAS Camp and A/S Boucher made, you should note that if the current hostilities do not cease, it will be almost impossible to negotiate a viable long-term solution that ensures a permanent peace. You should also address humanitarian concerns, urging both protection for NGO officials and facilitation of their access to conflict-affected areas to assess needs and provide aid. Finally, it would be useful to again ask the GSL to address Tamil concerns and provide a true alternative to the LTTE for the many who feel disenfranchised. In light of the Mullaithivu bombing that killed upward of 60 Tamil youth, you could note that both we and the GSL often criticize the LTTE for recruiting child soldiers. You might wish to add that it's

unacceptable that large numbers of youth become the victims in conflict situations, regardless of the circumstances or the perpetrators.

¶14. (C) You will also have a meeting with politicians from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), an umbrella group for a number of Tamil political parties aligned to the LTTE, some through choice and others through fear or necessity. TNA politicians will relay your message to the Tigers, so you should strongly condemn the use of terrorist tactics, including the recruitment of child soldiers, political assassinations, claymore mine attacks, suicide bombings, and the capture of civilian water supplies. You should note that the onus is on the LTTE to renounce terror in word and deed if it seeks to change its status as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in the eyes of the US, UK, EU, and Canada. You should also elicit the TNA representatives' views on the August 14 claymore mine attack in Colombo, asking whether the LTTE might now specifically target foreigners.